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EXECUTIVE BOARD

First regular session of 1994

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 1st MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Tuesday, 15 February 1994, at 10 a.m.

Temporary President: Mr. HADID (Algeria)

President: Mr. ANSARI (India)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.30 a.m.

OPENING OF THE MEETING

1. The TEMPORARY PRESIDENT declared open the first regular session of the Executive Board of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) for 1994 and welcomed the newly elected members of the Board. He recalled that, in its resolution 48/162, the General Assembly had decided that the governing bodies of the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Children's Fund should be transformed into Executive Boards.

2. He wished to pay special tribute to the Associate Administrator of UNDP, Mr. Luis María Gómez, the announcement of whose retirement he had received with great sadness. Mr. Gómez had made an invaluable contribution to the Programme and his loss would be deeply felt.

3. Mr. MACHIN (United Kingdom), supported by Mr. SERSALE di CERISANO (Argentina), expressed the Executive Board's sincere appreciation for the exceptional contribution which Mr. Gómez had made to the work of the Programme.

ELECTION OF THE BUREAU OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

4. The TEMPORARY PRESIDENT said that, until such time as the transformation process had been completed and new rules of procedure adopted, he would take it that the Executive Board wished to follow the rules of procedure of the former Governing Council in such cases where the provisions of General Assembly resolution 48/162 provided insufficient guidance.

5. He invited the Board to elect a Bureau consisting of a President and four Vice-Presidents, due account being taken of the need to ensure equitable geographical representation. According to the pattern of rotation of the office of President among the various regional groups, the President of the Executive Board for 1994 should be elected from among the members of the Group of Asian States. That Group had nominated Mr. Ansari (India) for the office of President.

6. Mr. Ansari (India) was elected President by acclamation.

7. Mr. Ansari (India) took the Chair.

8. The PRESIDENT said that the Board was in a period of transition during which new ground rules would have to be established for the effective functioning of the Programme. He was confident that the Board would fulfil its mandate, which had been set out in General Assembly resolution 48/162, with the sense of commitment and transparency that had become the hallmark of the Programme. Towards that end, the accumulated experience of UNDP would be invaluable as the Programme continued its mission to improve the lot of mankind everywhere.

(The President)

9. The candidates nominated by the regional groups for election as Vice-Presidents of the Council were: Mr. Dobrev (Bulgaria) (Group of Eastern European States); Mr. Sersale di Cerisano (Argentina) (Group of Latin American and Caribbean States); and Ms. Jacobsen (Norway) (Group of Western European and Other States).

10. Mr. Dobrev (Bulgaria), Mr. Sersale di Cerisano (Argentina) and Ms. Jacobsen (Norway) were elected Vice-Presidents by acclamation.

11. Mr. SPETH (Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme) said that 1994 marked a new beginning for the Board and he wished to pledge the full support of the UNDP Administration in shaping the new Executive Board into an efficient governing mechanism, for the benefit of all concerned. General Assembly resolution 48/162 provided the mandate and outlined the functions of the new Board, but it was for its members to fashion a new style of governance and debate. He hoped that the traditional spirit of consensus would be the basis on which the new Executive Board would build.

12. Ms. SADIK (Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)), wished to associate herself with the comments of previous speakers regarding the contribution of Mr. Gómez to the work of the Executive Board.

13. She said that General Assembly resolution 48/162 on the restructuring and revitalization of the United Nations in the economic, social and related fields would be remembered as an important step in ongoing efforts to enable the United Nations system to fulfil its special responsibility to attain the goals and objectives of Agenda 21, the World Population Plan of Action and the International Development Strategy for the Fourth United Nations Development Decade, a vital aspect of which involved promoting and securing essential international assistance and providing technical support. With regard to the need to establish a separate Executive Board for UNFPA, she said the specific wording referring to that issue, in the last sentence of paragraph 22 of resolution 48/162 had been incorporated into the draft programme of action submitted by UNFPA to the third meeting of the Preparatory Committee for the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD). She looked forward to working with other members of the Executive Board at the upcoming meeting of the ICPD Preparatory Committee in April 1994.

14. On the question of the organization of work of the Executive Board and the need to establish priorities among the subjects to be considered, UNFPA wished the Committee would show flexibility in its allocation of agenda items among its various sessions in 1994. In particular, she suggested that the Board could take up, at its annual session in June 1994, those items listed on pages 13 and 14 of the provisional agenda (DP/1994/L.1) which had policy or financial implications, the remaining items to be allocated to the other meetings as the Board considered appropriate.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA (DP/1994/L.1)

15. The agenda was adopted.

ORGANIZATION OF THE WORK OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

16. Mr. GRAISSE (Secretary of the Executive Board) said the Board would consider its meeting and documentation requirements as a separate item during the February session, since General Assembly resolution 48/162 had not provided detailed recommendations as to the Board's working procedures. With a view to ensuring that the Board would function as efficiently as possible, he suggested basing the discussion of the organization of work upon questions relating, firstly, to the work and meeting schedule for 1994 and, secondly, to rules of procedure.

17. With respect to the schedule of meetings for 1994, he said the Board could hold its 1994 annual session either at Geneva or at Headquarters. Facilities had been reserved at Geneva for 16 to 24 June 1994 and could be made available anytime during the period from 31 May to 24 June 1994. Also, no meeting rooms would be available at Headquarters from 16 to 27 January 1995. Lastly, meeting facilities would be available for a meeting on 17 to 18 March 1994 in the Trusteeship Council Chamber, although the meeting of resident representatives the subsequent week in Rye, New York, would make it difficult for the Executive Board to meet on those days.

18. He drew attention to the list of documents contained in annex II to the provisional agenda (DP/1994/L.1) and said that, in allocating documents between regular sessions of the Board, the secretariat had tried to follow the recommendations made during informal consultations on the division of labour between regular and annual sessions. The specific criteria followed by the secretariat in preparing the allocation of documents were listed in a conference room paper. Lastly, he suggested that the Executive Board could take a decision on the arrangements for the two field visits, the first to the Philippines and Viet Nam from 11 to 22 April and the second to Algeria, Jordan and the occupied territories from the end of April to early May 1994.

19. Mr. CLAVIJO (Observer for Colombia) said he supported the views expressed by previous speakers on the contribution of Mr. Gómez to the work of the Executive Board.

20. With regard to the programme of work, Colombia believed that proposals submitted in the course of informal consultations were satisfactory. He supported the option of holding a session in June at United Nations Headquarters, since Colombia would find it difficult to be represented at Geneva at that time. Secondly, with respect to the question of the location for Executive Board meetings, Colombia understood that no final decision had been made with respect to the building in which the meetings would take place. His Government believed that the UNICEF House or UNDP headquarters could be used for that purpose.

21. With respect to substantive questions to be addressed by the Executive Board, he suggested the Board could take up the issue of the Office for Project Services (OPS), which required immediate attention. Colombia could, however, accept postponement of consideration of that item until June, if the Executive Board felt it was necessary although that would require stepping up the pace of the Board's work.

22. Mr. GRAISSE (Secretary of the Executive Board) said he had not meant to imply that the Executive Board had reached a final decision to hold its annual session in the United Nations Headquarters building. His intention had been simply to determine whether the Executive Board would have access to conference services in the event it could not meet at the UNDP headquarters building or UNICEF House. Also, he said he would provide additional information at a subsequent meeting on the financial implications of using the UNDP headquarters building.

23. With regard to the agenda item relating to OPS, he said that it was for the Executive Board to decide when to take a decision on that question. The secretariat stood ready to provide the necessary documentation for the Board's consideration of the matter.

24. Mr. AMAZIANE (Morocco) said that, in the course of informal consultations, a consensus had emerged to refrain from discussing the question of a venue of the Executive Board's annual sessions. Also, with respect to the duration of the sessions, there appeared to have been a consensus in favour of two weeks spread out over the year. Furthermore, if the Executive Board retained the three-week format, it would be departing from the intent of General Assembly resolution 48/162. Lastly, his delegation hoped the Executive Board would decide to hold its annual session at United Nations Headquarters.

25. Mr. GUILLEN (Peru) said that his delegation felt the annual session should last for two weeks and should be held in New York. The priority should be to facilitate the participation of national experts rather than to chase after conference services.

26. The question of the participation of observers, should be resolved at the current session; if sessions were to be shorter, countries concerned with particular subjects should be able to participate; when the membership of the Board had been reduced, there had been an implicit understanding that non-members would be able to participate as observers. Working groups should be established in order to expedite the work and make it more efficient. His delegation was in favour of holding meetings at UNDP headquarters, in accordance with paragraph 27 of General Assembly resolution 48/162.

27. At the appropriate time, the Administrator should make a report to the Board on financial prospects and the availability of resources.

28. Mr. OBLIN (France) said that his delegation felt that it was important for the Board to continue to hold sessions alternately in Geneva and New York. It preferred the later dates for the September session, so that the session would not be too close to the International Conference on Population and Development.

29. Mr. PEDERSEN (Denmark) said that there would not be much time for substantive work at the current session, and the Preparatory Committee for the International Conference on Population and Development would be meeting in April; it would therefore be advisable for the Board to meet in March, particularly since resident representatives would be present for the meeting of the Preparatory Committee.

(Mr. Pedersen, Denmark)

30. His delegation agreed that the annual session should be two weeks long and would consider the Geneva option. He agreed that it would be difficult to hold the September session on the earlier dates because of the International Conference. He hoped that the possibility of holding meetings between September and December would not be excluded every year because of the General Assembly session. As to the venue of meetings, his delegation looked forward to meeting in the respective headquarters when it became possible. It believed that the Board needed to maintain a flexible attitude about the division of labour.

31. Mr. SERSALE di CERISANO (Argentina) said that his delegation could support the suggested schedule of sessions. It would be useful to have a session in March in order to prepare for the mid-term review in June, particularly since resident representatives would be available then. The June session should last for two weeks; there was no justification for a three-week session. His delegation would prefer the New York option since the UNDP secretariat was based in New York. It would also prefer the later dates for the September session, so as to avoid the first week of the General Assembly, when many Heads of State would be in New York.

32. Mr. PAPADATOS (Observer for Greece) said that General Assembly resolution 48/162 was the starting-point for the Board's work. It was his delegation's understanding that all States would be able to participate at Board sessions; they should be able to state their views freely and should have full access to documents. His delegation supported the Geneva option for the annual session. Since the Board was in a year of transition it should take up important items requiring immediate attention. Appropriate arrangements should be made to enable the Board to take a final decision on the question of OPS as soon as possible.

33. Mr. EIDHAMMER (Norway) said that there was clearly a need for a more efficient and better coordinated United Nations development system. Member States needed to improve the way they supervised the system; it was their responsibility to see that it was made more relevant and efficient.

34. The purpose of the new Boards was to ensure greater continuity, better operational guidance and a more continuous dialogue with the secretariat; the Board therefore needed to meet often enough to fulfil those purposes. His delegation agreed that in view of all the issues facing the Board in 1994, there was a need for a session in March, taking advantage of the availability of resident representatives. The question of OPS should be taken up as soon as possible, at a session either in March or in May. The annual session should afford an opportunity for all members of the United Nations system to consider the most vital issues facing UNDP. The agenda must therefore be restricted to issues of general importance. The session should not be too long, and could be limited to one week. The interval between the annual session and the January session was too long; the Secretary should look into the possibility of organizing a session in November, and countries which had been elected to the Board should give priority to such a session. His delegation looked forward to the possibility of meeting in the UNDP headquarters building.

35. Mr. MACHIN (United Kingdom) said that since the Board was in a transitional period, it was important to be flexible and pragmatic. His delegation was in favour of taking up the question of OPS at an early stage, at one of the spring sessions. In general, it preferred a two-week annual session and supported the Geneva option. The Board should abide by the Governing Council's decision to meet in Geneva in 1994, rather than raise the whole question of the validity and sustainability of the decisions taken by the Governing Council. His delegation agreed that, for practical reasons, the September session should be held on the later dates.

36. Mr. MONROE (United States of America) said that his delegation supported the proposal for a shortened annual session of not more than two weeks; it hoped that the Board's sessions would be more productive than in the past and would provide clear guidance to the Secretariat. It was in favour of holding a March session, particularly because of the opportunity to interact with resident representatives. The other proposals by the Secretariat were generally acceptable. His delegation hoped that in future it would be possible to free Board meetings, to the extent possible, from the imperatives of the United Nations schedule. The most efficient way of removing the question of OPS from the agenda would be to consider it at an early stage and resolve it; a small group should look at the issue over the next few months so that the Board could move swiftly at its next session.

37. Mr. RUNGE (Germany) said that he preferred the dates of 10 to 13 May for the next Executive Board meeting. He also favoured holding a two-week annual session in June and believed that in accordance with past practice, the venue should be Geneva. An autumn session from 28 to 30 September would not be useful. At the spring session OPS should be discussed and sufficient time allowed for UNFPA issues in anticipation of the International Conference on Population and Development.

38. Ms. RIBEIRO-VANDERAUWERA (Belgium) said that, in the view of her delegation, the active participation of observers should be encouraged because they often made essential contributions. Her delegation saw no need for a rigid division of labour between the annual and regular sessions of the Executive Board. The number of meetings scheduled should be reviewed each year in the light of changing needs. The Executive Board should establish ad hoc groups and committees to discuss specific issues.

39. Mr. FERNANDEZ-PITA (Observer for Spain) agreed that the UNDP Governing Council decision to hold the annual meeting at Geneva should be maintained. Regarding the division of labour between the annual and regular sessions, matters relating to OPS should be discussed at all meetings, whereas most logistical matters should be left to the regular sessions.

40. Mr. GORELIK (Russian Federation) said that the main task of the new Executive Board was to enhance the effectiveness of UNDP. Although the current session was organizational in nature, the issues before the Board involved matters of substance. Four sessions per year, including the organizational session and the annual session, appeared to be a reasonable number, but the Executive Board must avoid burdening the secretariat with excessive preparations for those meetings. Annual sessions should focus on strategic and policy matters and dialogue with the Administrator, while regular sessions should deal with operational questions such as programme, budget and financing. His

(Mr. Gorelik, Russian Federation)

delegation would like to see assistance to transitional economies added to the list of subjects for consideration.

41. Mr. PASHA (Pakistan) said that, with regard to the venue of the annual session, the current practice should be followed, and the sessions shortened to two weeks.

42. As to the procedures of the new Executive Board, the rule of consensus should be maintained for all decisions. General Assembly resolution 45/264 should also be borne in mind, as it had provided the parameters of the restructuring in the economic and social fields, and had been the basis for resolution 48/162. In his view, that resolution should be interpreted with a degree of flexibility. The rules of procedure should not be redrafted and should be amended minimally. He saw no need for ad hoc negotiating bodies. The active participation of observers should also be encouraged.

43. Mr. TAZADRID-SUAREZ (Cuba) said that, ideally, future Executive Board meetings should be held at UNDP headquarters. Observers should be free to make their contributions to the deliberations. The number of issues considered at the annual session should be reduced if the duration of the session was to be two weeks. It was important to avoid micro-management and setting up too many subsidiary bodies.

44. Ms. DOWSETT (New Zealand) said that her delegation could accept the venue and duration of the annual session, as proposed in the document circulated by the secretariat, and supported the statements of the representative of the United States.

45. According to the "headquarters rule", Executive Board meetings should be held in New York because the UNDP secretariat was located there, but it had long been the practice to alternate between New York and Geneva. Because of General Assembly resolution 48/162, however, the Board was going through a transition period. The decision-making process should be as transparent as possible, and the Geneva venue for the annual session might militate against broad participation by observers from States which did not maintain representation in both New York and Geneva.

46. Mr. GRAISSE (Secretary of the Executive Board) said that if the Board so desired, a session could be arranged in the period between the February and June sessions, subject to General Assembly approval. In the past it had proven very difficult for the Governing Council to meet while the Second Committee was in session, and specific dates could be announced only after reviewing the latter's programme of work.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.